

WASHINGTON, DC—Congressman Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield) made the following statement in response to House passage of the conference agreement on H.R. 3074, the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development and Related Agencies Appropriations Act for FY2008 yesterday. The bill passed by a vote of 270-147. DeFazio is the Chairman of the House Highways and Transit Subcommittee.

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“I am pleased to vote for this transportation spending bill that makes key investments in our infrastructure. It's not a perfect bill, but it comes close to meeting the funding guarantees we set out in SAFETEA-LU. H.R. 3074 fully funds highway programs at the authorized SAFETEA-LU levels.”

“According to the 2005 Report Card by the American Society of Civil Engineers, we need to invest \$94 billion annually to improve our road infrastructure nationally. And that hasn't been adjusted for inflation or the rise in construction costs. Every year we're investing just a fraction of the cost of our needs, yet the President has said he'll veto a transportation spending bill that's just 3% more than his request for the Transportation Department. That is irresponsible.”

“Although the bill provides less funding than the authorized amount for transit, I am pleased the appropriators provided significantly more funding than the President requested. The administration actually proposed drastically cutting funding from the transit New Starts program. To further drive home the point that this President doesn't support transit, USDOT used all its FY07 discretionary transit money to bribe five communities to participate in their Urban Partners program.”

“Congress has not authorized the administration's Congestion Initiative or the Congestion-Reduction Demonstration Initiatives, and I am highly concerned with the Department's use of federal discretionary funds to implement unauthorized initiatives. It appears that the USDOT intends to continue the same Congestion Initiative that Congress refused to fund in this bill, but with a thinly-veiled name change.”

“The discretionary programs from which USDOT has taken FY07 funding and proposes to take FY08 funding to support its Congestion Initiative have specific, statutorily-based eligibility requirements and goals. For instance, the federal statute does not give the Secretary the express authority to evaluate and award bus grants based on factors not enumerated in the statute, such as congestion pricing. Nevertheless, USDOT has awarded and again plans to award bus grants only to those “qualified jurisdictions” that employ “direct highway pricing during congested periods.” This approach takes federal funding away from statutorily authorized uses and directs it toward Bush Administration initiatives not authorized by law.”

“I applaud the appropriators for including language in this bill to prohibit the Administration from spending FY08 dollars to pursue their fatally-flawed proposed rule for the New Starts/Small Starts programs. The FTA's proposed rule would drastically change the ways in which New Starts and Small Starts projects are evaluated, rated, and constructed. If allowed to go forward, the programs would have been drastically altered in defiance of clear congressional intent and would have been detrimentally affected for years to come.”

“I am also pleased that in light of the tragic August bridge collapse in Minnesota, the appropriators have provided vitally important funds to help states deal with the backlog of deficient bridges throughout the country.”

“And, finally, I applaud the appropriators for holding firm and upholding the overwhelming will of the Congress to prohibit the use of federal funds to implement the Administration's cross-border pilot program to allow Mexican-domiciled trucks into the U.S. Mexican trucks pose a serious threat to the safety of our highways and the security of our country.”

In May, the House voted overwhelmingly, 411-3, to pass H.R. 1773, the Safe American Roads Act of 2007, legislation which would extend the pilot program to three years and ensure that DOT establishes a process to analyze the impact of allowing Mexican trucks on our nation's roadways, before the border is completely opened. Provisions were also included in the FY 2007 Iraq War Supplemental spending bill to impose strict measures to ensure that the pilot program adheres to safety and security guidelines and that its progress is assessed by an independent panel.

The conference agreement must now be passed by the Senate before heading to the President, who is expected to veto the bill.

